



# NATIONAL Indigenous Times



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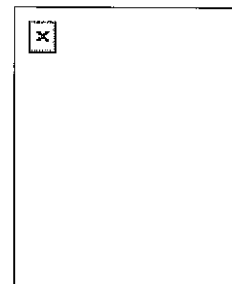
## OPINION: NIT coverage of bi-lingual debate a disgrace: Scrymgour

Issue 182 - 23 Jul 2009

ISSUE 182, July 23, 2009: In the past few editions of the National Indigenous Times, we've included extensive coverage of the decision by the Northern Territory government to effectively axe bi-lingual education in Aboriginal schools. That coverage has been the subject of a detailed complaint by the former Minister for Education in the NT, Marion Scrymgour. The National Indigenous Times stands by our coverage 100 percent. However, in the interests of fairness, we have printed Ms Scrymgour's complaint, a full transcript of Ms Scrymgour's responses to NIT questions, and a media release from Ms Scrymgour which further outlines her position.

I HAD BEEN waiting anxiously for the next edition of NIT to be published. I had hoped it would be an opportunity for me to set the record straight after a great many months of misrepresentation and character assassination regarding one aspect of the "Transforming Indigenous Education" I developed when I was the Northern Territory Education Minister.

If I had thought there was any possibility that a paper like NIT (which I, perhaps naively, thought would give an Indigenous person in my position subjected to concerted and organised lobby group criticism a fair right of reply) would not publish (ie in the hard copy edition of the paper) my answers to the fairly facile and ill-informed questions that were put to me, I would not have chosen to comment at all



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and would have relied on my earlier press release (see attached).

So I got hold of a copy of the new edition late this afternoon. What I read made me feel angry and sick in the guts. It is one thing if people are going to judge me on the basis of my actual position. I have to live with that. But to be confronted with:

- A banner headline reading "No regrets over bilingual scrapping" (when you know I reject the proposition that the "step method" is the only legitimate form of "bilingual" and assert that the "two way learning" approach at schools like Gunbalanya, Barunga, and Beswick is also a form of "bilingual education"), and a following article purporting to be my position in relation to the relevant aspect of the Transforming Indigenous Education policy;
- An unfair and misleading small selection of quotes from my answers to NIT questions comprising only half the article followed by the other half of the article mostly devoted to statements from critics (themselves apparently operating on inaccurate information regarding the proposed curriculum);
- A dot point in a "Timeline" reading "October 2008: Scrymgour proposes the first four hours in English policy, a move which effectively dismantles bilingual education in the Northern Territory" (rubbish) without any acknowledgement of my explanations about the continuing use of Aboriginal languages in the classroom during those four hours;
- A lengthy article by NIT reporter Madelaine Sealey relying heavily on quotes from Tom Calma, who has himself launched into the debate under the evident misapprehension that four hours English means 'English only' with no use of Aboriginal language as an ESL teaching tool (despite my lengthy response to his similarly ill-informed forays, a response which was published and should still be accessible on the ABC Unleashed website);
- A full two-page rant by Tom Calma full of motherhood statements that completely fail to engage with relative merits of "step method" teaching vs "two way learning" teaching and once again is predicated on the notion that I was intent on getting rid of Aboriginal languages from Northern Territory classrooms (something which he by now knows is quite false);
- An invitation to readers to read my answers to NIT questions, not by reference to a clearly identifiable link or icon on the NIT home page but by telling readers to visit the NIT website and then "Go to the 'search archive' link and search on the phrase 'Scrymgour'. I did just that and could find only an old (and negative) story by Tara Ravens. Even if my answers are cached in there somewhere, how many readers are going to bother to navigate a 'search archive' journey. Most readers will only read the hard copy material, conclude (and who could blame them) that I had no interest in preserving (and increasing funding for) Aboriginal languages.

I believe NIT's coverage of these issues and in particular its inadequate representation of my true position is a disgrace.

I am quite happy to repeat my mea culpa about the shortcomings in the Transforming Indigenous Education consultation process (although why is it, can I ask, that NIT hasn't covered a single one of the many other and arguably more important tranches of that policy?).

In particular I acknowledge that when the "four hours English" reform was first announced, I passively allowed that to be presented in a manner which gave the sort of wrong impression which Tom Calma continues to seize on. However, I took clear steps to correct that well before I stepped down as Education Minister, including by clarifying my position in an adjournment speech I gave in parliament.

I have great respect for some of the contributors to NIT, in particular Larissa Behrendt, Brian Johnstone and Graham Ring, and up until today I had hoped to have a constructive relationship with NIT moving into the future.

I request that you take immediate effective steps to amend the record to properly and fairly reflect my true position.

Marion Scrymgour

Member for Arafura



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## Opinion

### OPINION: A reply in writing from Scrymgour

Issue 182 - 23 Jul 2009

ISSUE 182, July 23, 2009: Last month, as part of our coverage of the NT bi-lingual debate, we sent former Minister for Education, Marion Scrymgour a list of questions. The reply was lengthy and, as is standard practice, we published excerpts which summarised Ms Scrymgour's view. However, Ms Scrymgour has complained the quoting was selective, and misrepresented her position. NIT stands by its reporting and rejects the assertions made by Ms Scrymgour. However, in the interests of fairness, following are the questions and responses in full.

NIT: Despite the overwhelming national and international evidence that shows bilingual education leads to better learning outcomes for Australian children or children where English isn't their first language, why did you then go ahead with the policy change?

MARION SCRYMGOUR: Your question is predicated on at least four implicit premises, none of which are accepted by me. Firstly it is implicit in your question that "bilingual education" is a uniformly interpreted and applied concept and that it is interchangeable with the "step method".

The reality is that international research covers a range of teaching and learning scenarios where two languages are involved. Students whose education commences with "step method" teaching are in fact not in a bilingual teaching environment at all - their early teaching is in one language only.

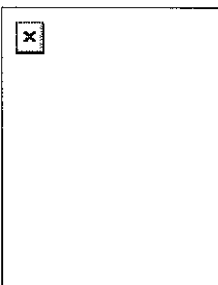
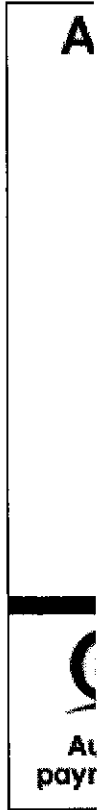
It is arguable that very many remote schools in the Territory which do not utilize the "step method" - but instead attempt from the earliest years to expose children to English language literacy using a regional Aboriginal language as a teaching tool - come closer to implementing a plain language interpretation of "bilingual education".

Secondly it is implicit in your question that international evidence in relation to the "step method" of bilingual education is directly and without qualification applicable to the contemporary Northern Territory situation.

As I have stated in my 26/6/09 media release (a copy of which I believe was forwarded to NIT's NT correspondent Graham Ring), I accept that there are international studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of the "step method" in the particular social and demographic contexts in which the relevant research was conducted.

Some of those studies were conducted in relation to first languages spoken by large homogeneous populations larger than the whole population of the Northern Territory, and where teaching of a particular class was by a single teacher equally fluent in both languages.

Analysis of the international research and assessing the applicability of particular findings to the contemporary context is a complex exercise, and it would take me



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pages to go through the factors which weighed on my assessment of the material I considered. Suffice it to say, I was not persuaded that the circumstances of international trials which reported successful "step method" teaching outcomes were adequately replicated in the contemporary Northern Territory "step method" schools (I believe that circumstances may have been significantly different in the NT in past decades).

But as I also conceded in my press release, I am open to debate and persuasion in respect of particular Territory schools and programs, and my decision to defer the full implementation of the new policy until the commencement of the 2010 academic year appropriately gives those schools more time to present a case for exemption.

Thirdly, it is implicit in your question that the international evidence in relation to "bilingual education" does not support the proposition that in a social and linguistic context where children's earliest learned language is 'language A' (ie. a regional Indigenous language), their exposure to a second relevant language (ie. English) at the earliest possible time does not deliver significant benefits and advantages (in particular in terms of brain development and plasticity/versatility).

In fact the recent international evidence is to the effect that the earlier a child is exposed to a second language the better. These findings in my opinion support a bilingual education model in which both the relevant Indigenous regional language and English are taught from the earliest possible time.

Fourthly, it is implicit in your question that "the policy change", as you refer to it, was one that discouraged or even prohibited the teaching or learning of relevant Indigenous regional languages. That is incorrect.

The policy was designed to achieve two goals: enhancing and emphasizing the early and effective exposure of remote school children to standard Australian English; and the effective and structured maintenance and protection of existing and salvageable Aboriginal languages.

The policy envisaged the allocation of funding and human resources for Indigenous language literacy teaching in all bush schools, not just the comparatively small number of "step method" schools. English would be the target language in the mornings, with Aboriginal languages being used as a teaching tool. Aboriginal languages would be taught as subjects in their own right in the afternoon.

It is not really possible for me to answer your question in a manner which ignores or puts to one side the various false premises I have identified. "The policy change" was part of an inter-related suite of policy reform measures called Transforming Indigenous Education. That policy was set out in a 21-page Word format document which I had intended and requested should be publicly released.

At no time was focusing on "step method" schools the primary motivation for "Transforming Indigenous Education". The issue that has been raised on behalf of those schools is whether they should be exempted from the teaching regime and curriculum which other remote schools would be expected to comply with.

On the information available to me (both in terms of test results and anecdotal evidence) I formed the view that the exemption of "step method" schools was not justified, given that relevant Aboriginal languages could still be used as a teaching tool during the morning, and taught as subjects in their own right in the afternoon.

NIT: Your predecessor Syd Stirling said he would have kept bilingual education and invested in the programs to make them work. Why did you make your decision against previous policy?

MARION SCRYMGOUR: In fact the aspect of Transforming Indigenous Education which is the subject of your questions was an extension of a policy decision previously made by former Minister Stirling to mandate a two-hour English teaching block in each school day.

As for "keeping bilingual education" and "investing in programs to make them work", my response is that the policy formulated when I was Minister (I cannot of course speak for or make commitments on behalf of the current Minister) was one that very much sought to keep "bilingual education" (in the sense of retaining Aboriginal

teachers and teacher assistants in the teaching of ESL English and in the sense of including Aboriginal language literacy as a stand alone subject in the school curriculum). I was also prepared to make substantial financial and human resources investments in such programs.

NIT: You've publicly commented that you regret the decision to axe bilingual education in the Territory. Can you comment on why you came to that decision and what you might do now to seek to reverse it?

MARION SCRYMGOUR: Once again your question is based on inaccurate factual premises. I did not say that I regretted "axing bilingual education in the Territory", and as would be evident from my answer to question 1, I dispute that the relevant policy decision involved the "axing of bilingual education" at all. What I did say was that I sincerely regretted the mistakes I made as a Minister in inadequately explaining the nature and effect of the policy change and in not taking more time to consult with affected communities and schools (in particular the "step method" schools). My inadequate explanation of the policy enabled certain opportunistic critics to attribute to me offensive agendas such as seeking to close down homelands, and it was also alleged that I was acting as some sort of puppet of the Commonwealth government.

NIT: Tom Calma said on last Friday that by comparing Territory results to the national benchmark tests, the NT Government had been "spooked" into responding by the Federal Government. Do you believe this was the case?

MARION SCRYMGOUR: The less I say about Tom Calma and his ill-informed foray into this issue the better.

- SEE ALSO: Scrymgour outlines her position
- SEE ALSO: NIT coverage of bi-lingual debate a disgrace: Scrymgour



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## Opinion

### OPINION: Scrymgour outlines her position

Issue 182 - 23 Jul 2009

ISSUE 182, July 23, 2009: On June 26, Marion Scrymgour issued the following written statement in response to media articles criticising her decision over the future of bi-lingual education in the Northern Territory.

During the period that I was the Minister for Education a new policy was developed called "Transforming Indigenous Education".

In 'Word' format the relevant policy document ran to 21 pages, and featured a primary focus on improving school attendance together with 8 inter-related supplementary measures or strategies, namely:

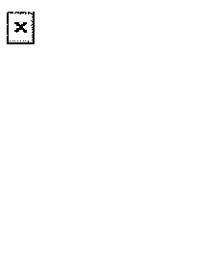
- a strategy aimed at supporting and engaging with parents and families of school age children;
- a strategy aimed at orientation/induction for an retention of non-Indigenous staff;
- a strategy aimed at upgrading the skills of Indigenous teaching staff;
- a strategy aimed at enhancing and upgrading the ESL teaching skills of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teaching staff;
- a strategy aimed at ensuring effective teaching of core curriculum content and increasing exposure to Standard Australian English;
- a strategy aimed at establishing regional boarding hostels for Indigenous students;
- a strategy aimed at establishing and resourcing regional Community Education Boards (with functions analogous to those successfully discharged by Aboriginal community-controlled health boards).

I had requested and intended that the full text of Transforming Indigenous Education be made publicly available, and I am surprised that that hasn't been done. The formulation and implementation of education policy is now of course a matter for the current Education Minister.

One component of the strategy aimed at ensuring effective teaching of core curriculum content and increasing exposure to Standard Aboriginal English was a policy relating both to the content and delivery of the first four hours of teaching in a school day and to the establishment of structured and funded programs for the teaching of regional Aboriginal languages.

I have already publicly acknowledged, and I do so again, that I failed to properly explain the policy I was trying to introduce and also failed to effectively consult with affected schools and their communities.

The reduction of the policy to the phrase "four hours English" did not address the



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mixed language complexity of teaching English in a "non-bilingual" school in a remote Aboriginal community (such as Gunbalanya).

It also failed to inform such communities of the Government's commitment to retaining Aboriginal language teaching within the school curriculum.

When I was attacked by critics of the policy as being a person who wanted to destroy Aboriginal language and culture, I tried to explain that that wasn't the policy intention at all.

However by then it was probably already too late to change the initial impression that had been created.

So I acknowledge my mistake in relation to the way I attempted to introduce the policy.

However, and contrary to comments attributed to me on ABC radio (recently), I do not at this stage regard the policy as a "mistake".

The policy was influenced not by "lobby groups" but by my concern about the effectiveness of "step method" teaching in a contemporary Northern Territory context.

I accept that "step method" teaching may be an effective strategy in other countries (especially where the first language of instruction is spoken by a large number of people and where teaching is conducted by a single teacher completely fluent in both languages), and that it may have been more effective in the Territory in the past (when some of the dedicated professionals - both Indigenous and non-Indigenous - who have given decades of their lives to maintaining Territory Aboriginal languages were actually working at the "coalface" as teachers).

The information provided to me (both in terms of the most recent testing results and in terms of anecdotal evidence) indicated to me that children's potential progress was being hindered, not helped, by not being exposed to English literacy teaching at the very beginning of their education, rather than only after a three year stagger.

I believed that from the earliest possible age, children should be spending quality time in front of a blackboard with words on it that are spelt in English.

As it happens at Gunbalanya, the teaching of those English words may in the early years be conducted substantially in a language other than English. But in a strict bilingual school using the "step method" the words on the blackboard will be in an Aboriginal language for at least the first 3 years of the child's education.

As I have already mentioned, my policy intended to retain and properly structure into the curriculum teaching hours where the word on the blackboard would be in the relevant local language.

Those would be the allocated hours for the teaching of that language in its own right. But the plan was that for the first four hours of the day, the words on the blackboard would be in English.

Now, as regards those areas of the Territory where there are critical mass populations of Aboriginal people all or most of whom speak the same language (including, but probably not restricted to, the Yolngu-speaking areas, the "Warlpiri" triangle; the Tiwi Islands; and Pitjantjatjara-speaking parts of Central Australia) I accept that there are sufficient numbers of students to justify the teaching of the "step" method if it could be done effectively.

Although I am, of course, no longer in a position to directly implement policy, I am open to being persuaded that I was wrong about my view as to the contemporary effectiveness of "step method" teaching in those critical mass areas.

However, when it comes to communities where there is a multiplicity of languages, or where the lingua franca is Kriol and not the regional Aboriginal languages which so desperately need to be protected and maintained, my view is still very firmly that for the first four hours of the day ESL teaching should be the norm, but with the curriculum also structured and funded to effectively teach original regional language literacy.

This outcome was exactly what the elders at Numbulwar told me they wanted when I consulted with them, and I made a commitment on behalf of government to initiate implementation of that by way of the establishment of a new language centre to be run in conjunction with the school.

I have heard the comments that have been made by Miliwanga Sandy, an accomplished linguist and leader whose achievements I respect.

The application of the policy I was developing to her home community of Wugularr, should have resulted in English being taught at the school for the first four hours but using Kriol as teaching vehicle, and then for the other hours of the teaching day, structured language literacy courses in Rembarrnga, Miaili, and Dalabon (and perhaps also Jawoyn, given the traditional ownership of the land on which Wugularr is situated).

I want to speak to Miliwanga about that model to see whether we can reach some common ground.

In the meantime, I do not wish to make any further comment, because my words and views about this complex and nuanced subject have already been significantly misquoted and misinterpreted (and I accept that part of the blame for that falls on me).

Marion Scrymgour MLA

Member for Arafura

- SEE ALSO: A reply in writing from Scrymgour
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Former NT Minister for Education, Marion Scrymgour.

## NEWS FEATURE: No regrets over bilingual scrapping

ISSUE 181 - 09 Jul 2009

By Madelaine Sealey

NORTHERN TERRITORY

ISSUE 181, July 9, 2009: Northern Territory independent, Marion Scrymgour does not regret her decision while a minister in the NT government to scrap bilingual education in remote Aboriginal communities, saying that evidence supporting bilingual education is not applicable to remote Aboriginal schools.

The former NT Minister for Education introduced the policy early last year, which requires that lessons be taught in English for the first four hours of every school day.

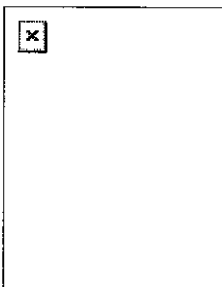
In many remote Aboriginal schools, English is a second or sometimes third language.

The policy came into effect early this year impacts on nine formerly bilingual schools in the Northern Territory.

It is yet to be completely implemented, but once rolled out will mean that lessons will be taught in Indigenous languages for less than two hours in the school day.

Many experts say the reality is lessons won't be taught at all in Indigenous languages.

Initially, the Northern Territory was forced to back down following condemnation from



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educators, politicians, experts and parents. It has since announced that there will be a transition period of a year involving further consultations.

But the changes, which are expected to be fully implemented by 2010, were not a mistake the former minister told NIT last week.

Ms Scrymgour said she did not consider the policy change was an "axing of bilingual education" and that "certain opportunistic critics" were wrong to assert she had been "acting as some sort of puppet for the Commonwealth government".

Shortly after announcing the policy change, Ms Scrymgour resigned from the Labor Party, citing concerns at its approach to Indigenous policy.

However, she told NIT her only regret on the bilingual policy was that the government failed to properly consult with communities about the changes.

"What I did say was that I sincerely regretted the mistakes made as a Minister in inadequately explaining the nature and effect of the policy change and in not taking more time to consult with affected communities and in particular the [relevant] schools," the NT Independent told NIT.

"I was not persuaded that the circumstances of international trials which reported successful 'step method' teaching outcomes were adequately replicated in the contemporary Northern Territory 'step method' schools.

"I believe that circumstances may have been significantly different in the NT in the past decades.

"I am open to debate and persuasion in respect of particular Territory schools and programs.

"My decision to defer the full implementation of the new policy until the commencement of the 2010 academic year appropriately gives those schools more time to present a case for exemption."

Late last month, affected community residents and leading bilingual teaching experts repeated calls for the Northern Territory government to reverse the policy, during a symposium in Canberra organised by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS - see next page).

Among those were the authors of a new report which argues that the current policy will not improve Indigenous literacy outcomes.

The report, *Gaps in Australia's Indigenous Language Policy: Dismantling bilingual education in the Northern Territory*, reveals that young children learn best when taught in their mother tongue. The authors argue that this is supported by "decades of research into bilingual education for children who don't speak the dominant language".

"This decision could spell the death of the remaining endangered Indigenous languages in Australia," the authors warn.

"A disturbing aspect of the Minister's decision is the fact that she could destroy the bilingual education programs on so little evidence."

The report also notes that the NT government's decision has ignored evidence that found bilingual education had significant "cognitive, societal and education benefits".

"It is equally concerning that the policy could be introduced without solid justification for its adoption and without indication as to how it would be implemented."

The current Northern Territory Minister for Education, Paul Henderson (also the NT Chief Minister) did not respond to questions from NIT at the time of press.

\* Marion Scrymgour's responses to NIT's questions can be read in full at <http://www.nit.com.au>. Go to the 'search archive' link and search the phrase 'Scrymgour'

It was with disappointment and some bitterness that I read the Crikey article by Bob Gosford on 10/2/09 – the one which quoted great chunks from a document purporting to be minutes of a meeting I had attended. The first word which came to mind was “verballed”, but in truth the comprehensive misrepresentation that was achieved was the result of selective and self-serving omission of key aspects of the dialogue which took place between myself and the other Aboriginal persons present on that day.

I have had other things on my plate, and I had decided to just let it pass as one more salvo from a particular cabal of self-important whitefellas with an empire to defend and important people in high places to complaint to. But when I was told that your too-smart-by-half contributor had posted a further pompous rant based around the same meeting, I thought it was time to say something.

The meeting on 4/2/09 involved a constructive and respectful dialogue between myself and the 4 Yolngu people referred to in Gosford's blog article, Yalmay and Mandawuy Yunupingu, Djuwalpi and Rarriwuy Marika. It was an opportunity to explain my position to them. I am adamantly in favour of preserving Aboriginal languages and literacy. I explained to them very clearly that I have and always will be supportive of language classes in our schools but in a structured time in the afternoons.

I will be pursuing an apology from Leon White for the outrageous and vulgar abuse he put in a letter he wrote to me that referred to a woman I considered a friend and a great leader – Dr. Marika. As well as being a woman who understood the importance of retaining Indigenous culture and language she understood the importance for Northern Territory Aboriginal kids of learning proper English, and she educated her own children accordingly.

As regards the petition from Maningrida, my response was to point out that the view of the Djebbana traditional owners of Maningrida as expressed to me by an authoritative spokesperson was that they did not have any confidence in the bilingual program at the School (built up over years with a focus on Burrarra) and wanted their children taught English in the classroom.

No mention in Mr. Gosford's article about how I set the record straight about closing down a bilingual program at Numbulwar – a community where the reality of bilingual for kids is Kriol and English. It was me that sat down with the old people when I visited them to talk about education and language and worked out a plan through which their traditional language of Nunggubuyu could be revived and maintained.

I firmly believe that it is crucial for core curriculum subjects to be taught in English from the beginning of a child's school years for the 4 hours in the morning. I will again point out again that non-Aboriginal linguists who had come to the Northern Territory to study and make careers out of Aboriginal languages had not left formally qualified Aboriginal linguists in their place, and that the only way that we could address that problem was for Aboriginal students to become fluent in English so that they themselves could obtain the formal qualifications possessed by those linguists and ultimately replace them.

Despite the snide suggestions from Gosford to the contrary, I believe that at the end of our meeting all 5 of us were in substantial agreement.

There are many other details of correction I could add. But I am tired of the nitpicking. Too much ongoing misinformation from whitefellas like Gosford who can just walk away from the plight that faces our people.

As for him saying "Hopefully this will be my last few words on the brief tenure of Marion Scrymgour as NT Education Minister". They may be Mr Gosford's last words on myself as Education Minister but I will be making damn sure that there will be more words from me on the substantive issues in this debate.

I subscribe to *Crikey* and acknowledge that some of the material it publishes comes from contributors I hold in high esteem – for example Dr. Jon Altman. Time and other constraints have made it difficult for me to respond promptly to issues concerning my Education portfolio that have been covered in *Crikey* recently, but I have become increasingly exasperated with the misleading content and strident tone of some of that coverage. I wish to now respond to the article by Samanti de Silva on 14/11/08 and the article by Bob Gosford on 28/11/08 (I actually phoned Bob on Friday and put to him in person a number of the matters I have set out in this article).

The second sentence in Samanti de Silva's article was "The NT Minister for Education, Marion Scrymgour, recently announced that Indigenous languages can not be used in NT classrooms, except for one hour a day in the afternoons". The article went on to assert that "the bilingual schools have marginally better results in English than the English-only remote schools" and attached a letter signed by local residents. The letter conveyed a concern that I was going to ban Pitjantjatjara from the school. It was addressed to me but was in fact sent direct to *Crikey*.

The statement attributed to me at the beginning of Ms. de Silva's article came as a surprise. I have not said that Indigenous languages cannot be used in NT classrooms and nor have I said that the teaching of Indigenous languages must be restricted to one hour in the afternoons. My position is that for four hours in the morning Monday to Friday students should be learning maths and English. The "step" method taught at some bilingual schools involves the teaching of literacy in an Aboriginal language before progressing to the learning of literacy in English. The "step" method doesn't fit well into my proposed policy position because I want the teaching of English literacy to start at the very beginning of a remote student's education rather than being introduced some years later. However, I fully understand and expect that the English literacy teaching process is going to involve the use of regional Aboriginal languages. While I continue to wholeheartedly support the teaching of literacy in appropriate regional Aboriginal languages I say it should take place in the afternoon not in the morning. I am keen to resource schools to undertake such teaching for more hours in the afternoon than may currently be allocated for classes (and I note that at many schools a practice has developed of not conducting classes on Fridays at all).

As regards the comparison of results between bilingual schools and the so-called "English-only" remote schools (probably a misleading label, but more on that shortly), my assessment - after a careful review of evidence from various sources is that the results in English at the bilingual schools are not in fact "marginally better" than those from the "English-only" schools.

Since the publication of Ms. de Silva's *Crikey* article I have spoken to Tarni Andrews, one of the signatories to the letter featured in the article. Mrs. Andrews and other Aboriginal teaching staff at the various bilingual schools have been told by those with a particular barrow to push that Aboriginal teaching staff will lose their jobs next year. I have assured Mrs. Andrews that to the contrary my goal is to try and achieve an outcome where most if not all teaching positions are filled by qualified Indigenous teaching staff. I will be going to Areyonga in the very near future to tell the other Aboriginal teaching staff there the same thing.

Moving now to Bob Gosford's article, which includes a bizarre quote from Michael Duffy regarding former Education CEO Margaret Banks and "the old departmental culture of blocking and gate keeping". The policy I have been developing for transforming Indigenous education has been the subject of discussion with senior departmental staff since the beginning of this year. Key components include the establishment of community-controlled education boards in three trial sites (which will take in certain bilingual schools), a zero-tolerance approach towards truancy, and a stronger emphasis on numeracy and English literacy. I am determined not to be thwarted by any vestiges of "the old departmental culture of blocking and gate keeping".

In its complete version published in Bob Gosford's *Northern Myth* his article also sets out an entire speech made in Territory Parliament by the Leader of the Opposition, Terry Mills. I should thank him for that because it gives me the opportunity to identify for the first time in the pathetically "dumbed down" debate that has taken place in the media so far where the true battle lines lie.

Mr.Mills' speech makes no reference to the "step" program. Instead he states that the common practice is to teach proficiency in English "through the mother tongue". He goes on to say: "This approach is concentrated in the early years of schooling, probably better referred to as teaching English as a second language". That is not a description of teaching literacy in an Aboriginal language (as occurs in the "step" program). It is a description of what happens at the Kunbarllanjja School where my friend Esther Djayhgurrnga has been the Principal for about seven years. Esther and other Aboriginal staff use the regional language of the area, Kunwinjku, to teach their students English literacy. This process starts from the moment that a child first enters the school, and the aim is to try and achieve effective English fluency and literacy. Kunbarllanjja is classed as an "English-only" school and misses out on the 20% additional funding given to "bilingual" schools. It appears that Mr.Mills and I both support that sort of teaching as a strategy for achieving English literacy.

The difference between my position and that of Mr.Mills is that unlike me Mr.Mills does not support the use of remote schools to teach literacy in regional Aboriginal languages. He says "it is my firm view that it is neither the responsibility, nor the capacity of the education system to develop proficiency in both English and the first language". By contrast, I believe that schools have an important role to play in teaching regional Aboriginal languages and thereby ensuring their survival. I am simply saying that that teaching should take place in the afternoons.